

House Resolution 203

By: Representatives Stephens of the 164th, Day of the 163rd, Gordon of the 162nd, Stephens of the 161st, Carter of the 159th, and others

A RESOLUTION

1 Celebrating the life and memory of music icon Mr. John Herndon Mercer on the occasion
2 of the centennial year of his birth; and for other purposes.

3 WHEREAS, Mr. John Herndon Mercer was born in Savannah, Georgia, on November 18,
4 1909, and exhibited his love of music at an early age, spending hours at music stores, in local
5 parks listening to bands, and at factories observing employees sing gospel and folk music as
6 they worked; and

7 WHEREAS, in the 1920's, Mr. Mercer stowed away on a boat to New York City, where he
8 worked as a Wall Street runner, wrote poetry, drew cartoons, and composed lyrics for *The*
9 *Garrick Gaieties*, a popular music and comedy revue; and

10 WHEREAS, a man with Southern gumption and "boyish" talent, Mr. Mercer went on to
11 celebrate great success as a songwriter, performer, promoter, and entrepreneur; and

12 WHEREAS, although he could not play an instrument proficiently or read or write music
13 separately, Mr. Mercer had a natural ear for writing music and lyrics together, as evidenced
14 by his over 1,700 songs, with innumerable top ten and number one hits; and

15 WHEREAS, considered by some to be the finest American lyricist, Mr. Mercer's songs have
16 been featured in almost 100 movies and 20 theater shows, earning 18 Academy Award
17 nominations and four wins; and

18 WHEREAS, Mr. Mercer's songs continue to influence modern film making, inspiring the
19 titles to such movies as *Fools Rush In* and *P.S. I Love You* and appearing in soundtracks from
20 such movies as *City of Angels* and *Ocean's Eleven*; and

21 WHEREAS, as a performer, Mr. Mercer was equally acclaimed, having at least one song in
22 the top ten for 221 weeks and earning a Grammy Hall of Fame Award for his recording,
23 "Accentuate the Positive"; and

24 WHEREAS, passionate about the music industry's future, Mr. Mercer formed The
25 Songwriter's Hall of Fame in 1969, with the mission to benefit, support, and attract new
26 talent to the song writing profession through programs, scholarships, promotional activities,
27 and publications for aspiring artists; and

28 WHEREAS, perhaps one of Mr. Mercer's most lasting impressions on the music world was
29 his work in cofounding Capitol Records in 1942, which became one of the top four recording
30 companies in the world within the first decade of its creation; and

31 WHEREAS, his work identifying and signing talented recording artists with Capitol was
32 unsurpassed; Mr. Mercer created a diverse catalog of music from artists such as The Beatles,
33 Nat King Cole, Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Judy Garland, Dean Martin, Bing Crosby, and
34 The Beach Boys; and

35 WHEREAS, Mr. Mercer's love for his home town of Savannah was evident in his many
36 contributions to local charities, and the city showed Mr. Mercer its appreciation in 1962,
37 when the Chatham County Commission renamed the Back River to the Moon River in his
38 honor; and

39 WHEREAS, organized by Savannah Mayor Otis Johnson and the Johnny Mercer Centennial
40 Committee, chaired by Dianne S. Thurman, events paying tribute to the accomplishments
41 and influence of the Savannah son will be held throughout the city in 2009; and

42 WHEREAS, a fitting homage to an artist with timeless appeal, the year-long spotlight of Mr.
43 Mercer launched on November 16, 2008 with a free tribute concert and will include events
44 such as music and book festivals, a film series, and several concerts, culminating on
45 November 16, 2009, with the unveiling of a bronze statue in his honor.

46 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES that
47 the members of this body recognize the centennial of Mr. John Herndon Mercer's birth,
48 commend his achievements and his lasting influence on the music industry, and join with
49 citizens and officials in celebrating the life of this remarkable Georgian.

50 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized
51 and directed to transmit an appropriate copy of this resolution to the mayor of Savannah, Otis
52 Johnson, and the chairperson of the Johnny Mercer Centennial Committee, Dianne S.
53 Thurman.